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ABSTRACT

This study reviews selected aspects of the evaluation process for the American Council on Education-Kellogg Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation. Attention is focused on developing an understanding of institutional transformation and the "lessons learned" about the various methods and strategies used. Institutions were selected for the project based on: breadth of campus involvement in the planning process; clarity of the institutions's vision and goals; extent to which the institution was ready to and capable of implementing its change agenda; and degree of recognition of the role and impact of institutional structures in accomplishing change. Project information sources included: institutional self-reflective reports and updates; "homework" activities completed by project teams in preparation for project meetings; reports from consultants who worked with each institution; correspondence with the agency and with consultants; and summary notes from project meetings. The information sources contained structured, open-ended questions which collected similar information about each institution, thus allowing inter-institutional comparisons. Data collection and analysis was a process carried out over four points in time, with teams selectively and progressively articulating and evaluating each set of lessons learned. Data analysis efforts resulted in a set of propositions that reflect strategies central to effecting institutional change. (SW)

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AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION
PROJECT ON LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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Capturing the Lessons Learned: The Evaluation Process for The ACE-Kellogg Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation

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ASHE

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, November 6-9, 1997. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

This document provides an overview of select aspects of the evaluation process for the *ACE/Kellogg Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation*. The project had two explicit components. The first and primary objective was to help institutions make progress on their self-defined, institutional transformation agendas. The second was to capture and understand the change process from the collective experiences of 26 diverse institutions so that other institutions might benefit. The original evaluation was concerned with both elements, but this paper focuses specifically on the challenges and methods related to developing an understanding of the methods and strategies used by project participants to effect institutional transformation.

To understand the transformation process at 26 institutions we needed to design a data collection procedure which allowed us to make inferences across cases, focus on the processes, strategies and methods of institutional change, and benefit from the structure of the project and the informed perspectives of a range of team members, ACE staff, and senior liaisons (informed consultants who individually worked with each institution).

The Challenges

Any project attempting to better understand a complex phenomenon faces a host of challenges it must resolve. For this project we had to design a process which best minimized the following problems faced in collecting and analyzing the information:

A large diverse group of institutions

As noted above, the primary purpose of this project was to help a group of diverse institutions make progress on their institutional transformation agendas. Thus institutions were selected which were thought to be in positions able to effect change rather than upon criteria for maximizing research results.

To arrive at our sample of 26 institutions, an invitation for proposals was sent to 450 ACE member institutions. From that invitation, 110 applications were submitted. A selection committee of ACE staff, staff from other higher education associations, past college presidents, and directors of similar national projects selected 26 institutions from that pool. Institutions were selected by the following 11 criteria based upon their submitted applications:

- breadth of campus involvement in the planning process;
- clarity of the institution's vision and goals;
- breadth of conceptualization and integration of the components of the change agenda;
- extent to which the proposed change themes connected to the institution's mission and identity;
- clarity of perception of what is driving the change and how these forces relate to the institutional mission and strengths;
- extent to which the institution has assessed its assets and liabilities, threats and opportunities in pursuing the change agenda;
- evidence of boldness, imagination, and excitement about change;
- extent to which the institution is poised and has the capacity to implement its change agenda;
- degree of recognition of and attention to the developmental needs of those involved in the change process;
- degree of recognition of the role and impact (positive and/or negative) of institutional structures and processes in accomplishing change;

- diversity of institutions.

Twenty-six institutions (5 research universities; 7 doctoral universities; 5 comprehensive institutions; 5 liberal arts colleges; and 4 community colleges) of which 8 are private and one is a public HBCU, were selected which represented the diversity of American higher education and were thought ready to make headway on institutional transformation agendas.

Different change agendas

One element which differentiates the ACE Project from others was that it involved institutions working on diverse change agendas rather than a common agenda (such as enhancing technology or implementing Responsibility Centered Management). This hallmark of the project complicated the process for collecting information on change, as institutions were engaging in strategies to effect different types of institutional change. The common element around which the project was designed was not the content of the change, but rather the magnitude of the change — transformational change which has depth, breadth, and pervasiveness.

Starting at different places in their agendas

In addition to diverse institutions working on a variety of change initiatives, institutions entered the project at different stages of the formulation and implementation of their campus agendas. At one end of the spectrum was a group of institutions that had been working on their transformational change agendas for many years. At the other end were institutions which began their efforts when they started the project. Still other institutions fell between the two poles. This created a challenge collecting information from institutions which were at different places in their transformation agendas.

The projects were in motion

Additionally, this project faced the challenge of collecting information while the campus-based projects were "in motion." Institutions were in the thick of implementing their transformation agendas, yet they were attempting to assess their strategies and methods which had not yet produced many results. This created problems in trying to anchor processes to outcomes, which in turn made it difficult to determine the value of the approaches.

Not directly observable nor consistently accessible information

Finally, the project did not have researchers on each campus to capture or record what was occurring. The project rather had to rely upon information provided by the team members and collected at periodic visits to campus. By not directly observing the processes the information collected became open to bias and inconsistency within and across institutions.

The described elements set limitations which prevented us from developing a data collection and analysis process which 1) focused on specific changes (such as curricular change), 2) included a process to assess the progress of each institution, 3) identify common strategies at a high level of specificity, or 4) determine the value added by the project.

Methods for Collecting and Analyzing Lessons Learned

To designed a data collection and analyses process that addressed the above challenges we developed the following process.

A focus on lessons learned

We felt the best way to capture the experiences of the 26 participating institutions in ways which others might benefit was to focus on the lessons institutions were learning through their efforts with various strategies and methods. The lessons learned would be based upon the

cumulative learning from project teams that was generated by their experiences and trials as well as from the lessons the senior liaisons were learning through their experiences working with clusters of institutions. Because of the complexity of the project, the diversity of institutions working on different issues and starting at different places, and our distance from the change efforts, lessons learned became our data collection centerpiece. Lessons learned (1) were easily captured in reflective reports, (2) allowed us to benefit from the collective experiences of informed insiders who were working with clusters of institutions, both project team members and senior liaisons; (3) incorporated the language of the participants into the findings; (4) were able to capitalize on both the successes and failures of project team strategies; and (5) were in a format that other institutions might easily use.

From the desire to understand the lessons institutions were learning about transformation we developed the following question to guide our process:

> *What general lessons about effecting intentional transformation can be identified from the experiences of 26 institutions?*

Our data collection and analysis methods were designed to address this question. Our goal at the completion of the project was to have identified a list of Project Lessons that institutions engaged in transformation might find helpful that were drawn from the experiences of project participants. The following description provides the road map explaining how we developed Project Lessons.

Data collection points:

The evaluation process was designed to encompass four measurement points in time so that the information was systematically and continuously collected.

The Baseline. The Baseline measurement was the starting point for data collection. The purpose of the Baseline was to help institutions begin the reflective process required over the course of the project, articulate their comprehensive change agenda, and think intentionally about the process of change. It also asked them to outline their intended strategies and methods to affect comprehensive change. The Baseline did not collect information pertinent to lessons about how to effect change, thus it will not be discussed further in this document. The role of the baseline was more salient to the primary objective of the project, helping 26 institutions make progress on their change agendas.

Mid-Point 1 and 2. The next two collection points occurred during the middle of the project. The project had two Mid-Points at which information on the institutional change process was collected. Each collection point coincided with a project meeting — Mid-Point 1 occurred in conjunction with the October 1996 Project Meeting and Mid-Point 2 coincided with the March 1997 Project Meeting. The Mid-Points helped institutions focus their attention on the processes, methods and strategies they were using to effect comprehensive change and to begin articulating what they were learning from their efforts. It was originally hoped that both Mid-Points would provide adequate information to collect and analyze lessons about change. Only after the information at Mid-Point 1 was gathered and analyzed did we realize that we were premature in collecting information about lessons learned. Project teams simply had not had adequate time to implement strategies, evaluate their results, and articulate lessons. Thus only Mid-Point 2 is discussed further.

The End-Point. The final information collection point was the End-Point. This was the terminal point for the project, although for most participating institutions it was not the completion point for their change agendas. The End-Point allowed ACE to focus extensively on what institutions have done to effect comprehensive change and the lessons they have learned through their experiences.

Sources of Information:

Information over the course of the project was gleaned from the following sources:

- Institutional self-reflective reports/updates;
- "Homework" activities completed by project teams in preparation for project meetings;
- Senior liaison reports from campus visits;
- Informal institutional self-reports, updates and correspondence with ACE staff and senior liaisons;
- Summary notes from discussions at project meetings.

The table below shows the sources of information by the point in the project at which it was collected. Each source of information obtained from institutions and senior liaisons became a unit of analysis.

BASELINE	MID-POINT 1	MID-POINT 2	END-POINT
First Inst. Report	Inst. Update	Inst. Update	Final Inst. Report
Sr. Liaison Update	Sr. Liaison Update	Sr. Liaison Update	Sr. Liaison Update
		Project Meeting "Homework"	Fall Forum "Sense of Meeting Notes"
		Meeting Summaries	Meeting Summaries

Mid-Point 2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Mid-Point 2 was the initial period at which the project began focusing on the lessons that institutions were learning about effecting transformation. Prior to this point, most institutions had not been working on their transformation agendas long enough to have reflected upon their strategies and methods and learned lessons about what they were accomplishing (and not accomplishing). Information at Mid-Point 2 was obtained from the following sources:

1. The project teams reflected upon their progress and learning through a requested Mid-Point 2 update;
2. Project teams completed reflective "homework" in preparation for the Spring Project Meeting;
3. The senior liaisons provided reports from campus visits;
4. The ACE staff, senior liaisons, and selected team members wrote summaries of the discussions at the Spring Project Meeting.

The mid-point updates, the project meeting homework and the senior liaison reports contained structured, open-ended questions which collected similar information about each of the institutions allowing for comparisons across cases and within institutions across data sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These three documents, along with summaries of discussions from the Spring Project Meeting, converged on similar questions to provided triangulated data to ACE, enabling us to collect data at multiple points and cross-check our assumptions and insights (Patton, 1990).

By Mid-Point 2, we were also able to distinguish between the progress of institutions which allowed us to assign various weights to their lessons. To determine which institutions were

making progress and which were not, the senior liaisons who were intimately familiar with the institutions and ACE Project staff classified the institutions into one of three categories: 1) moving forward, 2) moving somewhat, and 3) stuck. This classification allowed us to add weight to various lessons collected from institutional participants. For example, the insights about making progress from institutions that we knew were moving forward were given increased weight, while the lessons about progress from institutions deemed not making progress were assigned less weight, and in some cases disregarded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is at the heart of qualitative research; it is the process through which the data collected begins to take shape, form patterns and trends, and make sense. To begin analyzing the first set of collected data a three step process was followed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). First, the initial data which focused on lessons institutions were learning (institutional mid-point updates, senior liaison fall visit reports, project meeting homework, and summaries from the spring project meeting) was reviewed and pattern coded, a process which linked bits of data into "a smaller number of sets, themes or constructs" (p. 69). Second, we engaged in memoing, a process of writing up ideas and notions of the pattern coded data which "tie pieces of data together into a recognizable cluster to show that those data are instances of a general concept" (p. 73). Third, we developed a series of propositions from the memos attempting to capture the strategies central to effecting comprehensive institutional change.

After an initial draft of propositions was created, we invited the senior liaisons and an outside reviewer to read and comment on them. We asked them if the propositions made intuitive sense, if the experiences of the senior liaisons were consistent with the spirit of the propositions, and where the propositions might be modified and enhanced. Based upon the obtained feedback a second generation of propositions was drafted.

A second set of data was then collected and analyzed. The second data consisted of updates written by the senior liaisons describing their spring site visits as well as institutional self-reports and informal memos to ACE from various project teams highlighting their experiences. This data was additionally pattern coded. Two researchers independent of one another then engaged in memoing to link together the pattern coded data. By doing so independently, researcher bias was reduced (Patton, 1990). The two sets of newly created memos were then incorporated into the most recent set of propositions, creating two new sets of propositions, one from each researcher. The two drafts were then compared and reconciled creating a third draft of propositions.

End-Point Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

To continue the data collection and analysis process and refine the propositions, we sought additional data at the End-Point which was then incorporated into the propositions modifying, expanding, confirming and disconfirming our previous notions. The End-Point is the final phase of our evaluation process and the one which carried the most weight. (Although this paper is written in past tense, this final phase of data collection has yet to be completed at this writing. Thus, the design below is our intended process and may differ slightly from the actual final process.)

A three component End-Point process was designed to occur September 1997 through January 1998. The purpose of this final phase was to help institutions assess their progress, plan for their next steps at the conclusion of the ACE Project, and most importantly reflect upon what they have learned. At the End-Point:

1. Each team was asked to complete the End-Point Report which was to be written as a stand-alone document. The final report focused on (a) results and progress on their institutional transformation agendas (including initial expectations and actual outcomes), (b) reflections on the change process (including their lessons learned), and (c) thoughts and ideas on the concept of institutional transformation.

2. Each team was asked to use the final senior liaison visit to conduct a Campus Forum on Transformation. Composed of 25-30 people, each forum was designed to be a campus-wide discussion on the change process to help project teams 1) focus on their impact, 2) reflect on their processes and extract lessons they have learned through their experiences, and 3) plan for "life-after-ACE." From the campus forums, a "sense of meeting notes" was crafted capturing the discussion with specific attention to lessons learned.

3. The Final Project Meeting (January 1998) was designed to focus on lessons learned and confirmed. This meeting consisted of a series of discussions on lessons learned and the propositions drafted to date. By involving project team members to comment on the propositions, those most intimately involved with comprehensive change were allowed to give feedback, criticism, and clarity to the propositions which informed a next draft.

Data Analysis

The final data analysis procedure included reviewing four documents. From the three component End-Point process three documents were produced and a summary of the discussions at final project meeting was created. First, "sense of meeting" notes capturing the conversation at the Campus Forums on Change was collected. Second, a final report from each senior liaison highlighting their final visit and giving their views on each campus forum was obtained. Third a final report was drafted by each project team. Following a similar process, these documents were read and the data pattern coded and memoed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The new memos were then compared to the latest draft of propositions, modifying expanding, clarifying, confirming and disconfirming so that a final set of propositions might be created. (Because this process is yet to be completed, we are unsure if a single researcher will finish this process or if the luxury of multiple researchers working independently to reduce researcher bias (Patton, 1990) will be followed.)

The propositions were presented to project team participants at the final project meeting. From discussions of these propositions, meeting summaries were drafted. The information obtained from the meeting summaries were then analyzed. At this point the propositions became the first draft of Project Lessons. The Project Lessons were then distributed to senior liaisons and other experts on institutional transformation and asked for comments. From this final feedback we created a final set of Project Lessons.

Methodological Limitations

No research project is without its methodological limitations, it is what makes a project manageable (Leonard-Barton, 1995). At the same time, researchers can engage in a number of strategies to ensure acceptable levels of methodological rigor. Many of limitations originated from the difficulties identified early in the project and outlined at the beginning of this paper. Even though solutions were presented in the above descriptions of the data collection and analyses processes not all of the problems were addressed. The following limitations are those which could not be readily solved and may influence the Project Lessons.

The campus change initiatives are incomplete

First, most of the participating institutions' change agendas are incomplete. Because of the size and the scope of each institution's transformation efforts, project teams may not have observable evidence for some time. Limited results create difficulties linking processes to outcomes. At the same time, strategies which initially showed positive results may over a longer period lead to harmful effects. The same is true for strategies which initially failed as they may from the perspective of a longer time frame be seen as beneficial.

Information is self-reported

The bulk of the materials we collected were provided by the institutions themselves which can be limiting because of a number of factors. First, respondents, when reporting data on organizational processes tend to hold more prominently in their minds events which occurred more recently than in the distant past (Kanter, 1983). They judge the value of events, not based upon their impact or a cause and effect pattern, but by chronological proximity (Glick, Huber, Miller, Doty, & Sutcliff, 1995). Second, people tend to jump to conclusions about cause and effect; rarely do they attribute good results to poor analyses or incorrect actions, view good actions as having no impact, or find poor results coming from good actions or accurate perceptions (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). Third, informants may provide information which is incorrect or revisionist in nature (Leonard-Barton, 1995; Van Maanen, 1979). They may intentionally give information which is inaccurate or misleading because they want to hide controversial practices or decisions, or not reveal personal defects, mistakes or taboo activities (Van Maanen, 1979). This explanation may be specifically relevant in this project because institutions are participating in a highly visible national project. Informants may also unwittingly provide false information because they either were misled or given poor information by others, or because they were unaware of certain aspects of their own activities. (Van Maanen, 1979).

Cause and effect relationships are difficult to determine

The process of institutional change is a complex and not well understood phenomenon. In this project we asked institutions and those working with institutions (e.g., senior liaisons) to reflect and comment on a complex process. We asked change agents to draw conclusions and lessons about strategies to effect change when the links between cause and effect were tenuous at best and indeterminable at worst. The difficult in linking outcomes to processes may lead to "superstitious learning" (March & Olsen, 1975) as people attribute outcomes to the wrong processes.

Loose key insights through generalization

In this study, we attempted to draw generalizable lessons from a group of 26 diverse institutions working to implement diverse change initiatives. Our intent was to develop a set of Project Lessons informative to others desiring to implement transformative change. In our efforts to draw conclusions we most likely lost some key specific strategies that individual institutions used to effect change. We could not document all of the individual approaches or their nuances from each institution, and thus were unable to capture the detail that might have been important, but only so at a single institution.

Biased by the structure of the project

Finally, the findings might be biased because of the project design. The primary intent of this project was to help institutions progress on their institutional transformation agendas. By meeting the first project goal — helping institutions make progress on their change agendas — we most likely created an unnatural environment that prevented us from rigorously meeting our second goal — learning lessons that other institutions can use. (For example, lesson number one might be: join a national project which includes help from consultants.) We worked with institutions at numerous levels, such as at project meetings and through site visits with senior liaisons, gave them materials and information on institutional change, all interventions which (we hoped) facilitated

their processes. The involvement by ACE may have shaped their strategies and thus affected their lessons.

Nevertheless, we feel confident that our Project Lessons were developed in a manner which captures the collective experiences of those involved. We stand by their rigor and hope that others find value.

Resources

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